

Message Text

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USIA-15 DOE-11 SOE-02 OES-07 COME-00 EB-08 LAB-04

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, ENRG, ELTN, CA, US

SUBJECT: MEETING OF GOVERNMENT LEADERS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA,
YUKON AND ALASKA

1. B.C. PREMIER BENNETT, YUKON COMMISSIONER PEARSON AND ALASKA GOVERNOR HAMMOND MET FOR TWO DAYS (JANUARY 23-24) IN WHITEHORSE ON SUBJECTS OF MUTUAL INTEREST. (A SIMILAR MEETING WAS HELD IN VICTORIA IN 1976 AND IN 1979 ONE IS TO BE HELD IN ALASKA.) THE FOLLOWING IS A SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSIONS AS OBTAINED FROM PRESS REPORTS.

2. NATURAL GAS PIPELINE: ALASKA WILL PROVIDE B.C. AND THE YUKON WITH DETAILS OF ITS EXPERIENCE WITH PIPELINE CONSTRUCTION AND IMPACT AND THE STATE'S TAXATION PROCEDURES ON PIPELINES. THE THREE LEADERS ALSO AGREED THERE WILL BE LOCAL PREFERENCE FOR HIRING PIPELINE LABOR, ALTHOUGH SOME ARRANGEMENT MAY BE MADE TO ALLOW FOR A LIMITED AMOUNT OF IMPORTED SPECIALIZED LABOR. IT WAS FURTHER AGREED TO POOL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES TO FIGHT ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ABUSE, A PROBLEM REPORTEDLY ALREADY PLAGUING NORTHERN COMMUNITIES BUT WHICH MAY BE AGGREAVATED BY THE PIPELINE PROJECT. ALASKA AND THE YUKON ALSO AGREED TO COORDINATE PLANNING FOR THE
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PROTECTION OF THE PORCUPINE CARIBOU HERD WHOSE MIGRATION ROUTE COVERS BOTH TERRITORIES.

3. RAILWAY LINK: GOVERNOR HAMMOND SAID ALASKA HAS ALREADY SPENT DOLS 150,000 ON RAIL ROUTE SURVEYS TO THE CANADIAN BORDER AND HE EXPECTS ECONOMIC FEASIBILITY STUDIES ON THE LINK WILL CONTINUE. PREMIER BENNETT TOLD PRESS CONFERENCE THAT THE LINK WAS THE

ORIGINAL B.C. GOVERNMENT PLAN FOR THE B.C. RAILWAY BUT THAT THE NORTHERN EXTENSION OF BCR IS NOW SUSPENDED INDEFINITELY PENDING FINDINGS OF A ROYAL COMMISSION INQUIRY INTO BCR'S FINANCIAL CAPABILITIES (SEE VANCOUVER'S A-23 OF NOVEMBER 19, 1977).

4. AT JANUARY 24 WHITEHORSE PRESS CONFERENCE, PRIMIER BENNETT SAID B.C. IS STILL NEGOTIATING WITH OTTAWA FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO COPE WITH THE SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF THE GAS PIPELINE. HE REPORTEDLY INDICATED HE WAS HOPING FOR AN AGREEMENT SIMILAR TO THE ONE OBTAINED BY THE YUKON FOR A DOLS 200 MILLION LOAN FROM OTTAWA. HE DECLINED TO PUT A DOLLAR FIGURE ON THE B.C. PROPOSAL TO OTTAWA OR TO SPECULATE WHEN AN AGREEMENT MIGHT BE REACHED. THE PREMIER ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT HE IS AS POSITIVE ABOUT THE PIPELINE NOW AS HE WAS EIGHTEEN MONTHS AGO WHEN HE PROMOTED THE ALCAN ROUTE OVER OTHER ALTERNATIVES.

5. PRESS CLIPPINGS BEING MAILED TO EMBASSY AND EUR/CAN.
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